User Name: =

Date and Time: = 2025-10-12

Job Number: = 265105499

Documents (1)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "environment is a victim"

Search Type: NaturalAnd

Content Type	Narrowed by
news	Source Location: North America Source Location: United States

1. DEFENSE DEPT.: U.S. weighs cleanups as it plans Iraq exit

| About LexisNexis | Privacy Policy | Terms & Conditions | Copyright © 2020 LexisNexis

DEFENSE DEPT.: U.S. weighs cleanups as it plans Iraq exit

Greenwire

January 13, 2010 Wednesday

Copyright 2010 Environment and Energy Publishing, LLC

Section: Top Stories; Vol. 10; No. 9

Length: 1312 words

Body

Dina Fine Maron, E&E reporter

As the U.S. military prepares to leave Iraq, the Pentagon is wrestling with questions about environmental cleanup on the bases it plans to transfer to the Iraqi Army by December 2011.

At issue on and around the bases are unexploded ordinance, depleted uranium from munitions, spilled oil and contaminated ash in burn pits.

There is no set answer about what -- if anything -- the military must do to mitigate environmental damage. Though there are clear environmental policies for permanent U.S. bases overseas, they do not apply to contingency operations like those in Iraq.

"There's nothing in international law, U.S. law, or executive orders that guide [U.S.] policy" in such operations, said David Mosher, a senior policy fellow at RAND and co-author of a 2008 report for the Army on environmental considerations during contingency operations. "It's a huge loophole," he said. "There's nothing in DOD policy that says anything should be done." After the 1991 Gulf War, destroyed and damaged military vehicles were abandoned in Kuwait and posed a major cleanup challenge. Photo by Peter Turnley, Corbis, courtesy of UNEP.

The November 2008 security agreement between Iraq and the United States includes a short section referring to U.S. environmental responsibilities, but it has no specifics. It merely says, "Both parties shall implement this Agreement in a manner consistent with protecting the natural environment and human health and safety."

Historically, war zones have been left strewn with unexploded bombs, chemical weapons and herbicides. While there have been serious public health consequences in some instances and lawsuits for damages, countries rarely volunteer to pay for the environmental fallout from their operations.

After the 1991 Persian Gulf War, for example, Iraq's neighbors submitted environmental damage claims to the U.N. Compensation Commission totaling more than $80 billion. The United Nations subsequently awarded environmental compensation amounting to more than $5 billion.

Though military experts note that the ***environment is a victim*** in almost any conflict, there are steps that could be taken to lessen long-term consequences. Still, while it's possible to craft mission plans with sustainability considerations in mind, they say, any policy that could limit military operations would be difficult to get off the ground.

As a U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) guidance put it last fall: "During combat operations environmental considerations will be subordinate to mission accomplishment and preservation of human life, but cannot be ignored."

The guidance calls for CENTCOM to ensure that its forces clean up hazardous materials and any environmental contamination that could endanger the health and safety of its forces or the host nation. It also offers this suggestion for U.S. forces: "Develop a plan to return the area to its original or better condition that includes directions/actions required for areas that cannot be returned to original (or better) condition."

Still, there's no enforcement mechanism, and a guidance is not a rule. And further complicating matters is an unprecedented number of contractors performing cleanup work.

Weighing the extent of U.S. cleanup operations versus cost considerations is a "balancing act," Mosher said. "It comes back to what we are doing there. What's our long-term goal?"

The Defense Department's answer: "Our goal is to return bases to the Government of Iraq in condition supporting the safe reuse of properties."

But Col. Tim Hill, director of the Army's "Green Warrior Initiative," argues that future counterinsurgency strategies should incorporate environmental considerations into everything they do. His group was put together last spring to look into these issues following a review of the RAND study findings.

For Hill, the motivating factor behind incorporating environmental considerations into military operations is about more than doing the right thing. His role as director of this new task force, he said, is to "change the culture of the Army," to find ways to fight a counterinsurgency that considers environmental and sustainability issues.

"We can use environmental considerations as tools of engagement to assist and as a means of building trust and confidence," Hill said. "I don't believe we can win hearts and minds [in the Middle East] ... but I do believe we can build trust and confidence, which is different," he said. Undocumented problems

In the heat of battle, soldiers are unlikely to take note of spills in refueling operations and other environmental problems, so there are likely to be a number of undocumented environmentally damaging incidents.

But just addressing the environmental degradation the United States is aware of -- and discerning what damage pre-dated 2003 -- could be a large project.

Consider the military's challenge of disposing of solid waste.

In a contingency operation, each American solider generates 9 to 12 pounds of refuse a day, according to DOD figures. That waste must be burned in incinerators or pits or trucked to landfills. Burn pits come with their own environmental and health hazards, and trucking waste outside a country can sometimes be complicated by international agreements meant to prevent developing countries from becoming dumping grounds (Greenwire, Nov. 11, 2009).

Then there are undetonated weapons. U.S. military officials estimate that 3 to 5 percent of bombs, rockets and shells fail to explode. In areas with soft sand, that rate may rise as high as 15 percent, according to the U.N. Environment Programme.

To get an idea of the scope of the potential cleanup: At the height of the Iraq conflict, the U.S. and multinational forces occupied some 300 sites that have been or will be shuttered or turned over to the Iraqi Army.

Since 2007, 260 bases and facilities have closed, according to DOD. Environmental cleanup operations such as hazardous-waste disposal and burn pit, firing range and wastewater cleanups were "performed for each base or facility depending on the environmental features present, site-specific conditions and the planned reuse for the property," a DOD spokesman said. Liability issues

Decades of environmental mismanagement and more than a quarter-century of conflicts destroyed vast swaths of Iraq's landscape prior to the current war. From a liability standpoint, discerning what damage is a result of U.S. action in Iraq is another crucial part of cleanup operations.

Still, as part of the drawdown, the United States has tackled cleanup of some sites officials say predated its presence in Iraq.

U.S. troops in southern Basra, for example, cleaned an oil spill and contaminated soil around a generator at an operations center they expect to transfer to the Iraqi Army this month. The U.S. military, however, says the damage was from previous tenants at the site. The price tag to remove all the contaminated soil, transport it to a proper waste disposal facility and implement a precautionary spillage management system under the generator was $9,800, they say.

It has long been part of Pentagon doctrine for U.S. forces to conduct baseline environmental quality assessments when forces stay in an area longer than 30 days -- partly to ensure the United States won't be held responsible for environmental conditions that weren't its fault and partly to protect service members.

However, that policy has not always been thoroughly enforced, said Tad Davis, deputy assistant secretary of the Army for environment, safety and occupational health. A policy officially calling for environmental baseline assessment was laid out around 2008, he said.

"We put out the policy, and the policy is still in the process of being implemented throughout the service," he said. "I think that more folks are being made aware of it and have a greater appreciation of the benefits of doing it."

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newswire

Subject: ARMIES (91%); DEFENSE DEPARTMENTS (90%); ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES (90%); ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANUP (90%); PUBLIC POLICY (90%); US ENVIRONMENTAL LAW (90%); AGREEMENTS (89%); DEFENSE & MILITARY POLICY (89%); DESERT STORM (89%); MILITARY OPERATIONS (89%); NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS (89%); POLLUTION & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS (89%); SAFETY (89%); UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE (89%); WAR & CONFLICT (89%); WEAPONS & ARMS (89%); UNITED NATIONS (87%); CONSERVATION (78%); ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION & POLICY (78%); ENVIRONMENTALISM (78%); MILITARY WEAPONS (78%); SUSTAINABILITY (78%); SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (78%); EXECUTIVE ORDERS (77%); INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (75%); BOMBS & EXPLOSIVE DEVICES (73%); ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT (73%); WRITERS (73%); PUBLIC HEALTH (72%); UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTIONS (67%); VICTIM COMPENSATION (66%); SUITS & CLAIMS (65%); MEDICINE & HEALTH (64%); HERBICIDES (63%); LITIGATION (63%); NEWS BRIEFS (59%); ABANDONED VEHICLES (52%)

Company: AL MUDON INTERNATIONAL REAL ESTATE CO KSCC (55%)

Ticker: ALMUDON (KUW) (55%)

Industry: NAICS531110 LESSORS OF RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS & DWELLINGS (55%); SIC6513 OPERATORS OF APARTMENT BUILDINGS (55%); ARMIES (91%); DEFENSE DEPARTMENTS (90%); ENVIRONMENTAL

CLEANUP (90%); DEFENSE & MILITARY POLICY (89%); MILITARY OPERATIONS (89%); UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE (89%); MILITARY WEAPONS (78%); SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (78%); ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT (73%); WRITERS (73%); HERBICIDES (63%)

Geographic: IRAQ (94%); UNITED STATES (94%); KUWAIT (79%); GULF STATES (73%)

Load-Date: January 13, 2010

End of Document